

Community Resilience Initiative Leaves Legacy of Tolerance

Port of Spain, November 5, 2020: Over the last year, communities across Trinidad and Tobago (T&T), with the support of the United States Government, came together with their Venezuelan neighbors to become stronger, more cohesive, and more resilient.

Today, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), together with the United States Embassy in Port of Spain and Democracy International, officially closed the Community Resilience Initiative, a program that strengthened the capacity of communities in Trinidad and Tobago to adapt to the increase in migration of Venezuelans.

Delivering the keynote address at the closing ceremony, Acting Deputy Chief of Mission at the United States Embassy, Port of Spain, Joseph FitzGerald, said: “The U.S. is proud to assist both Trinbagonians and Venezuelans in their time of need and thank the communities of Arima, Mayaro, Chaguanas, and others that are so generously hosting Venezuelans that have fled their country.”

He noted the project has a far and wide-reaching impact “on the day-to-day lives of young people, women, and the most vulnerable nationals and refugees, which is uplifting and inspiring.”

Through the Community Resilience Initiative, USAID and Democracy International collaborated with local NGOs—Drama Making a Difference Company, Families in Action, Living Water Community, and Ryu Dan Dojo Empowerment Foundation—to strengthen social service delivery to both migrant and host communities, while also facilitating positive engagement between Trinidadians and Venezuelans. The project established safe spaces for activities conducive to building connections and trust between the two populations, while also helping them to access information, language classes, and psychosocial support, among other critical services. In the face of COVID-19, CRI used virtual platforms to continue offering key services to both T&T and Venezuelan populations and facilitating engagement and trust-building across nationality, while also ramping up the project’s social media tolerance campaign. Over the course of the program, the Community Resilience Initiative worked directly with more than 2,500 people—nearly equal numbers of Trinidadians and Venezuelans—while reaching many more through social media, radio, and television outreach.

Democracy International Chief of Party Morgan Simpson, who led the project’s implementation, shared, “It was truly inspiring to see communities come together, across every generation, every nationality, in the true spirit of the Trinidadian anthem of ‘Here every creed and race find an equal place’.” She attributed the project’s success to the passion and commitment of the project’s local partner organizations. Those partners, as well as project participants, participated in the virtual event to share aspects of the project’s impact from both a personal and community level. In a video with voices from project participants, one reiterated the ways Trinidadians and Venezuelans built trusting relationships through the program: “We are one people, just different cultures... [and] we supported each other as a family.”

The event closed with remarks from the USAID Eastern and Southern Caribbean Regional Representative, Clinton White, who shared: “I am touched to hear from so many voices about how this project gave you the skills, courage, and opportunities to come together as a community, Trinidadians and Venezuelans as one, resilient family.

“I am certain that the community built through this program will continue to thrive and endure. You’ve built a resilient family, and we are grateful to each and every one of you who shared this journey with us at USAID.”



Caption: Some of the participants in the Ryu Dan Dojo’s Support, Educate and Empower Women (SEEW) Program, showing off items made during one of their classes. Photo courtesy the Community Resilience Initiative.